Lateral

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Reawakening Ali Sardar Jafri's *Asia Jaag Utha*

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ABSTRACT The epic poem *Asia Jaag Utha*, written in 1950 by Ali Sardar Jafri of the Indian Progressive Writers Association, was a battle hymn of its time, a celebration of Asia's history and geography, with a vision for Asian liberation and communist revolution at the dawn of the Cold War in the aspirational Third World. Are its messages still applicable today, or is it strictly a period piece? This essay analyzes what Jafri was trying to do in his own context and explores whether it has anything to say to ours. In order to do this, the author enters into dialogue with Jafri's poetry, and proposes some updates to its political agenda that might be needed to carry its energy into the present. While the mid-twentieth century vehicles of progress and liberation (such as industrial development and the postcolonial nation-state) require critique, Jafri's emancipatory impulses and ideals of solidarity ring true.

KEYWORDS Asia, Cold War, Progressive Writers Association, anti-colonial, poetry, solidarity

WHAT

"Unlearning means not engaging with those relegated to the 'past' as 'primary sources' but rather as potential companions." —Ariella Azoulay

"Asia Jaag Utha!"

Asia has awakened.[1]

This is a wake-up call. A call to arms. A battle hymn. A victory anthem.[2] A weaponized propaganda broadcast. Written in 1950, Ali Sardar Jafri's incantatory, anti-imperialist epic Urdu poem speaks to a very particular moment: the dawn of the Cold War, and the dismantling of the modern European empires into a raft of new Asian and African states.[3]

It's an interpellation, hailing invaders, enemies, allies, ancestors, heroes and kin. What? You lookin' at me? I don't like your expression. Those days are gone when you—the colonial powers with your armies and aggressive commerce—were the masters, and we, the silently subjugated. Wretched no more, we are strong and elegant, silk and steel. There's something in the air and everything is in motion. The people march, the earth shifts. It is dawn in the east. The voice of the people is the voice of the land. The music of the people is the roar of the storms that move across it from end to end.

It's an accumulating fugue of interwoven motifs: lightning, thunder, wind, cloud, fire, sparks, stars, rainbows, dawn, springtime, eyes, tears, smiles, hands, footsteps, roads. A free-verse compendium of history and memory, lore and legend. Phalanxes of rhymed stanzas build toward the relentless pulse of each section's refrain: Get out of Asia! Rise up! We're advancing! A storm approaches the world!

Is "Asia Jaag Utha" applicable today, or a distinct period piece? Stylistically, it may seem like communist kitsch. But what about the substance of its message? In order to unpack what Jafri was saying to his own time, and whether his historical analysis and political agenda have something to say to us now, I tried something: I joined the song. Giving responses to his calls, I talked back to the poem in its own tone—easy enough to slip into, since I'd already begun echoing it in paraphrase and summary. The experiment was revealing. It answered my question better than dispassionate analysis alone had done. Somewhat to my surprise, I found that my response sounded more like a continuation than a

contradiction. Our differences were not really in the motivating impulses, but in the context-specific methods for realizing them.

Through Jafri's poem surges his Third Worldist emancipatory vision—a dream of liberation and solidarity containing much that remains nostalgically alluring, though it didn't quite come to pass as imagined or hoped. If we want to revitalize a revised Third Worldist ideal suitable as a decolonial vision for the twenty-first century, there are also aspects of that dream that it's important to critique. So I'll first try to locate the poem within its own time, and assess what Jafri is trying to do there as he illuminates the setting (Asia) and protagonists (Asians) at the heart of his political agenda; then add my proposals of what would need to change to carry its political energy into the present.

WHEN (Jafri's Context)

A prolific poet and critic, Jafri was a core member of the Indian Progressive Writers Association (PWA), a body of leftist cultural workers then at the forefront of South Asian radical politics. In the 1930s and 1940s, the PWA leadership were at the center of India's independence movement, framing it as a component of the global antifascist struggle leading up to World War II. Then in newborn India and Pakistan, they were central to the Soviet-backed Afro-Asian Writers Association (AAWA), literary wing of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO). Jafri dedicates this poem to the short stories of PWA General Secretary Krishan Chander, calling them "beautiful weapons in the Asian war of freedom"—which is precisely how the Progressive Writers viewed literature during this period.

To these leftist writers, the independence of 1947 was a false freedom, when not just regime change but revolution was needed. This poem is rooted in the perspective of an Indian communist in 1950—and of a Progressive Writer during

the PWA's most uncompromising hard-left moment. Jafri composed it while jailed, along with many other Communist Party of India (CPI) activists, for his support of the peasant uprising in Telangana, which had challenged the autocratic princely state of Hyderabad at the moment of its accession to the newly federated republic of India.[4] This they viewed as the true vanguard of an impending agrarian communist revolution in the subcontinent, then under attack by Nehru's bourgeois nationalist government.

Besides dissatisfaction with a partial liberation, Progressive Writers also mourned Partition, having advocated courageously for sectarian harmony. They were dedicated to the ideal of a pluralistic, composite South Asian culture and Hindustani language not divided into Sanskritized Hindi and Persianate Urdu. In the poem, Jafri sketches an Asian inheritance drawing on these elements, though without naming Pakistan, Partition, or the violent trauma it had unleashed.

Looking beyond the subcontinent to Asia as a whole, hope was high amid the dismantling of the British, French, and Portuguese empires, even as the geopolitical axis was being re-polarized between First and Second World superpowers. Beyond both, the Non-Aligned and Afro-Asian solidarity movements aimed for Third World sovereignty, autonomy, and decolonization.[5] South Asia was only the beginning: "Quit Asia" would expand upon "Quit India," the slogan of anti-British rebellion during the 1940s. It would not end until Asian defenders catapulted western military boots from Asian soil into hell or outer space. All of Asia was to follow the lead of anticolonial India and revolutionary China, toward a vision of liberation more ambitious than mere national independence. Jafri marks each spark: Korea is fighting. Burma roars. Vietnamese and Malayan guerrillas are on the move. Even beyond the vast continent, "imperialism's death on Asian soil" was a matter of globalized import: "Asia's freedom struggle is the world's struggle."[6]

Amidst Cold War internationalism, Jafri's affiliation was Afro-Asian, not Non-Aligned. He was in fact quite aligned: America was a neo-imperialist villain, the USSR an anti-imperialist champion. He names Truman, Acheson, and Marshall along with earlier British generals and colonial governors—Clive, Hastings, Wavell, O'Dwyer—juxtaposing what he sees as Chiang Kai-shek's corruption to that of Mir Jafar, the betrayer of Bengal to the British East India Company two centuries prior.

In contrast, Jafri's USSR is painted as patron, guide, defender and savior; polychromatic utopia, earthly paradise without slavery, tyranny, warmongering or oppression; an Eastern power, a federation of many Asian republics; not a national but a multinational, multiracial, and multicultural ideal for all humanity. To its critics he is savagely ruthless.[7]

Furthermore, this Soviet north star lights the way to a "grand destination," Mao's China. Jafri paints a verbal propaganda poster: Mao bestriding the Himalayas with his hand held high, pointing toward victory.[8] To Jafri in 1950, choosing Mao over Chiang, and the Chinese Communist Party over the Kuomintang, would also have implied choosing India's Communist Party (and AAPSO) over its National Congress (and NAM).

Nevertheless, Indo-Soviet friendship was promoted under Nehru through cultural exchange and economic aid. (Pakistan's government favored the US.) Film was a favored channel for soft diplomacy, and the Indian Progressive Writers participated avidly. For example, Jafri contributed the lyrics for *Pardesi* (foreigner), a 1957 joint Soviet/Indian film production written and codirected by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas.[9] Abbas, like Jafri, was a towering figure in the early years of the PWA in Bombay: screenwriter, director, journalist, novelist, memoirist. Starring actor Balraj Sahni was a founding leader of the Indian People's Theater Association, a 1943 offshoot of the PWA, and the brother of Bhisham Sahni, a later PWA General Secretary. Also known in English as *A Journey Beyond Three Seas*, *Pardesi* was based on the travelogue of a fifteenth-century Russian

merchant named Afanasi Nikitin, narrating his journey to India and relationship with a woman there. The love between Padmini and Nikitin stands in for the warm bonds of connection between Russia and India.

Abbas had also written a magazine story in 1944, "And One Did Not Come Back," which served as the basis for a 1946 film *Dr. Kotnis ki Amar Kahani* (the undying tale of Dr. Kotnis).[10] The real Dwarkanath Kotnis had traveled from India to offer medical service to the Chinese troops during the Japanese invasion. Like Nikitin, he too found love with a local woman. (As ever, in movies, to love another country and give oneself to it is embodied in a male protagonist's romantic relationship with a woman of that country.)

These historic journeys stood in for contemporary ones, together shaping the political and cultural context in which the poem operated. Yet another PWA participant, M. Kalimullah, wrote a travelogue called *Mao ki Desh Mein* (in the land of Mao) about a 1953 cultural delegation sponsored by the Chinese branch of the World Peace Council (WPC), with the goal of forging close ties through exchange and learning about each other's arts and culture.[11] The group assembled in Delhi and entered China via Hong Kong. Kalimullah records his worries and excitements —what a responsibility for artists to bear the weight of diplomacy and alliance, let alone concoct fabulous representative programming across art forms! But by the end of the journey—meeting and traveling with Chinese artists and cultural workers in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanking, Hangzhou, touring universities, sanitoriums, factories and cultural institutions–all are suffused in love and affection. The popular slogan "Hindi-Cheeni Bhai Bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers) is on their lips, tears in their eyes. The family feud resulting in the Sino-Indian / Sino-Soviet split was still almost a decade in the future. In the family romance of "Asia Jaag Utha," Lenin is still benevolent father to both Stalin and Mao, while China is both a fractal of the universe, and Asia's salvation.[12]

WHERE (Jafri's Geographical Imaginary)

Given the centrality of Asia here as both concept and location, what and where exactly is the terrain in question? To a world historian's eye, Jafri's Asia, sweeping from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, implicitly traces the Silk Road axis and its tributaries from Iran to China, with the subcontinent smack in the middle just across the Khyber pass, age-old gateway of armies, missionaries, traders of all sorts. Implicit too is the Indian Ocean rim as a worlding frame, weaving networks of trade and cultural influence across the eastern and western lobes of the Indian Ocean, across the Bay of Bengal or the Persian Gulf.[13]

Jafri catalogs its topography (caves, deserts, plateaus, hills, jungles); its natural abundance of fauna, flora, minerals and resources (coal, oil, iron, silver, tin, gems; mango, apple, almond, bamboo, coconut palm; spices, cotton, silkworms, handicrafts, hydropower). How can it be that the people of such a rich land are hungry? Who benefits from this wealth? Jafri echoes the economic drain theory of empire: for three hundred years ships plied the seas bearing away Asia's goods and indentured labor, "the toil of India, Burma, Malay, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Yemen." The West swallows mounds of cotton and silk while we "peasants, workers, cobblers, washermen and women, porters, ironsmiths" stand naked. Industrial commodity markets leave artisans and craftspeople destitute.

But in Jafri's poetic geography (versus his political economy), it's not just that the land's wealth should go to the land's people; the land *is* the people. Extraction is violent: the earth is sucked dry of oil as our bodies are of blood. So when the people fight back, the personified land fights back. Forests become the snipers they camouflage; soldiers are rivers in flood spate. What was seized will become weapons against the despoilers, as plowshares are turned into swords.[14] Insurrectionary peasants rise from the earth like seeds from the soil—not dead but

only sleeping, awaiting the springtime to sprout out reborn like the heroes of each age.[15]

True, the AAWA, AAPSO, NAM, and WPC were institutionally organized according to national units, with state-backed delegations. But what do not particularly stand out among the celebrated features of Jafri's Asian geobody[16] are the lines of national borders—so often drawn by conquerors and colonial administrators anyway, sundering some groups while forcing others together into motley states.

Instead, Jafri's horizontal pan-Asia is a pangaean supercontinent in which historical memories are not so much polyvocal as symphonic, fused into an aspirational chorale of leftist humanity, the bulk of the world's population. Even so, certain differentiations are assumed. Whereas Jafri's home, India, is the unspoken geographic center from which to view the panorama, Mao's China is first among equals. Gathering regions under China's wing, Jafri anticipates today's Belt and Road initiative strategically if not ideologically. And as in the movies, Jafri here too filters political relations into the romantic language of love poems as Nanking and Peking embrace Bukhara and Samarkand.[17] (Though here's one of our twenty-first-century questions for a mid-twentieth century blind spot: to Tibet and Xinjiang, might this then and now have felt more like rape than consensual embrace? Might Bukhara and Samarkand, then located within Soviet republics, have felt ambivalent about this flirtation?)

Nevertheless, as roads once blocked by empire now open, the renewed connections are inter-Asian and south-south, rather than metropole-colony spokes.[18] By the mid-1950s, Jafri's Pan-Asianism would converge with Pan-Africanism to yield the Afro-Asian ideal, and then in the 1960s with Latin America to form the Tricontinental global south, declaring the solidarity, cultural kinship and political commonality of the colonized world.

Such a geography—defined in the poem less by state affiliation than by relationship to the natural landscape and locations of uprising—can easily be part

of a vision for today.[19]

WHO (Jafri's historical actors)

Asia is a place. Asia is a place for Asian people. Asia is also a person, a dancing queen, decked in wind ankle bells and river necklaces.

"Now Asians will rule Asia," Jafri proclaims. But who are these Asians? The people, the place, and the poem's politics are all connected. He defines Asian identity not by race or nation, but by access to a common civilizational treasure house of richly heterogenous contents. The synthesis across ethnic, linguistic and religious boundaries—the ideal of unity in diversity, of an identity shared without being identical—applies inside Jafri's South Asia as well as across greater Asia. Additionally, his idealized Asianness is a political orientation rooted in the historical experience of (and resistance to) western imperialism.[20]

As he shakes awake family members, he maps an extended kinship starting from and then moving beyond a conventionally nationalist gendering. Mother needs her sons to avenge her and protect her chastity.[21] Then the Indian poet addresses his brother Asians: Don't be ashamed of your poverty. I'm with you and I get it. And although he starts by talking *to* his brothers *about* their suffering mothers, wives and daughters, eventually he greets the women directly too. "My sister! I recognize you" standing in the frontlines, facing bullets and holding a red flag.

This kinship comes not only through struggle but through a cultural inheritance encompassing thousands of years of heroes and villains, lovers and fighters. Rustam (hero of the Persian *Shah-nameh*), Arjuna (hero of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*), Farhad's Shirin, Dushyanta's Shakuntala, Majnun's Laila, Ranjha's Hir. Though catholically Asian, Jafri's vantage point is still the subcontinent, as he draws primarily upon Indic and Islamicate traditions deploying the Sanskritic and Persian ingredients typical of the Progressive Writers. Those he names reflect the

literary genealogy of the Urdu PWA: Firdausi, Saadi, Nizami, Khayyam, Hafiz; the luminaries of both sufi and bhakti poetry, feeding the ghazal tradition to which the Progressives themselves were heirs; their revered immediate predecessors, Tagore and Iqbal; plus their beloved international counterparts, stars of the Afro-Asian Writers' *Lotus* era, Turkey's Nazim Hikmet and China's Lu Hsun.[22]

Jafri's inventory of Asian cultural riches stretches from the architecture of the Indus Valley's Mohenjo Daro, Ajanta's carved caverns, China's Great Wall, Mesopotamia's ancient cities; to the vast edifice of language, rhetoric, imagination, epic and lyric poetry, theology. He lists the gifts of the Vedas, Gautama Buddha (teaching equality of all), Mazdak (teaching justice and love), Christ, Mohammed . . . all stars in the ancient heavens, now witnessing the latest prophet to come bearing gifts of philosophy: Mao with his glorious Red Army.

Implicitly, Jafri inverts Macaulay's notorious "Minute on Education" proclaiming one shelf of a decent English library more valuable than everything ever written in Arabic and Sanskrit, by declaring that even Asia's ruins outvalue the whole of Britain's "idle chatter." Oh, so you don't agree? he scoffs. You say *you* brought us culture and civilization? True . . . if your culture is toxic destruction. Your gifts to us were famine, disease, poverty and ignorance. You flogged, hanged, shot and jailed us. Your "superior" culture brought the Opium Wars, drug cartels, poison, slaughter. Death was the price of your technology, with your gunboat diplomacy and railway tracks laid over corpses. Though you built victory memorials, stole souvenirs for museum exhibits, the true monuments are not in art or architecture but in the marks left on our bodies and lives. The display of capitalist culture is told in Asia's afflictions.[23]

Nevertheless, the poet does not map his *us* and *them, we* and *you,* onto a simple axis of East and West. This is not a clash of civilizations, but a clash between the forces of invasion and resistance. The Boxers, the Taiping, the Sepoy Mutiny, centuries of revolts and insurrections, all were battles in the same long war of

peasants rising against empires. Similarly, Jafri scrambles the lines of today's divisions in the subcontinent when identifying who's on which side of justice or oppression. The lines he draws within South Asia are not between Hindu and Muslim, any more than the lines he draws in the larger world are between Orient and Occident; but rather between agrarian insurgents and imperial oppressors in all their guises.[24] Indeed some of his most notable examples are Asian on Asian: Ismailis versus Abbasids and Mongols, Marathas and Pathans versus Mughals. (The Mughals are a unique case, standing in sometimes for Asia's cultural, political, material and military glory, and sometimes for Empire resisted by Asia's local freedom fighters, peasants and poets.)[25]

Colonizers are liars and despoilers, violent and greedy. But traitors and collaborators are worse, because they should know better. They too were nourished here. But they sold out their own, for dollars. These are not the Asians who shall rule Asia. Jafri doesn't even want to utter the polluting sounds of their names: pimps to the brothels of Britain, France and America. "Ask your leaders, your native masters": you think you're free but if you are, then why are American and British troops still camped on your soil? Why are you fighting for rather than against their empires? As recently as the last war, Indian soldiers had fought Britain's battles.

Asia has experienced uncountable Alexanders, invaders from all directions, Jafri records. Demons are of all colors, forms and origins: this way a Ravana (many-headed demon-villain of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*), that way a Zahhak (another multi-headed foe, Ahura Mazda's snaky nemesis from Persian mythology). Here, there and everywhere, agents of the British Raj. (By 1950, doesn't "vile Churchill" know that "contemptible Kipling" has died?)

However, if traitors and oppressors come in all colors, so do those who serve freedom and justice.[26] No essentialist, Jafri embraces Western good guys just as he indicts Asian bad guys. So hold hands, everyone! Not only Asia's awakened

communist workers and peasants, but those of all the world, workers of all races united as one. We are all the rays of the same sun, the strings of one instrument, the waves of one ocean, all “inhabitants of one earth /. . . believers in one humanity; / There is neither a West nor an East . . . Life sings the songs of peoples′ victory.”[27]

Such a cultural identity (syncretic rather than purist, reclaimed for decolonial practice), and such a political identity (based in affinities of ethical commitment and relativity to power, rather than exclusive essences) are also compatible with a vision for today.

ONWARD . . . (To Jafri, an Homage)

Wake up! Wake up!
New morning or a minute to midnight,
there’s no more time
and it’s the perfect time.
The waters are rising and so must we (said my comrades in the climate crisis movement)
The people of the world are on the move
flooding over the lines scored on maps, incised on borders,
(cuts upon her body our body my body)
erasing them sure as waves sweep clean the sand.
We are coming, we are coming,
in currents converging across the land,
pressing on the dams of state and nation,
rising together with laughing waters, soaring mountains, dancing forests.

Oil companies, mining companies, monoculturists, militaries,
will not suck her blood, drain her body, drink her milkshake.

Nor shall we ourselves deplete her, thriving only by demanding no sacrifice of mothers, fathers, golden geese.

Hands raised to reach the stars we come,
hands outstretched to receive each other we come,
hands sparkling, snapping, consensing we come.
The winds rise, the waters rise, the people rise
in revitalization, resurgence,
restoring our living as the living of the land,
healing the depredations not only of the empires and capitalists
but of the newborn states and nationalists.

Sharing masala melange,
sharing hallows cross-fertilized and freely exchanged,
harnessing old ways, knowledge and treasures of deep time
to the conscious conscientious science of tomorrow
with the power to choose and judge,
examining both old and new technologies
not just for the magnitude of their capacities
but for the purposes to which these powers are applied.
Heeding Ocalan, Marcos and Ramona,
hearing Boggs, hooks, Davis, LaDuke, Barghouti, Kaba, so many more,
not as gurus and avatars but as but as siblings and elders,
fallible admirable teachers,
questioning and challenging as we listen and learn

Is it dawn or dusk?
Are these spring zephyrs or winter winds?
Doesn't matter, it is all in motion, and we are on the move together
forging bonds of friendship, reciprocity, symbiosis

out of all our rooted and routed particularity,
solidarity, planetarity.

Here's what I learned by trying to sing back to Jafri in his own mode. Where the music of his time harmonizes with the needs of ours is in the exuberant impulse toward liberation of land and people, rejection of imperialism and capitalism, transcendence of race and nation. Where the tunes diverge is in the containers for realizing them in the Cold War Afro-Asian context: industrial development; the postcolonial nation-state; Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Yet the poem's internal contradictions contain the dialectical seeds of its own sublation.

First, Jafri derided western civilization for the dubious gifts of its technology, its infrastructure of extraction (of minerals, plantation crops, labor, fossil fuels, forest goods, water) for commodities bought by the destruction of Asian land, bodies, blood. He also praised the USSR as it "brought under control rebellious rivers and wind," taming wild nature to yield not destruction and exploitation but progress and prosperity; for laborers dignity and bread. Yet throughout the poem he also celebrates this very rebelliousness of rivers and wind, forests and mountains rising up against oppression. While Jafri distinguishes the goals of Soviet technology from those of the West, we must criticize state-socialist industrial development as much as the capitalist version, for its legacy of environmental despoliation. Given Jafri's rapture with Asia's lush nature, painting the land itself as alive and sentient, perhaps today he would participate enthusiastically in the robust conversation emerging through ecosocialism and social ecology toward a greener left paradigm shift.

Furthermore, in Jafri's time the nation-state bore people's hopes for institutionalizing decolonization. But as with extractive industry, no matter in which peoples' name the state is constituted, the very form itself carries destructive risk and limitations. The new states drew their borders on the lines established by colonial administrations and prior conquests, in many cases

cutting through the homelands of “minority” groups that didn’t fit within state borders and may not have chosen to be incorporated anyway. These are the very groups now likely to feel marginalized, dispossessed, disenfranchised, militarily occupied, and exploited without sufficient representation, on the frontlines of domestic neocolonial resource extraction. After all, the new national governments inherited not only territorial boundaries but also political, legal, military, penal and disciplinary structures, appropriating them from the former imperial regimes instead of abolishing them.

While the federations of solidarity Jafri participated in were organized in national state units, the poem itself is intrinsically neither nationalist nor statist. With its natural topography and map of resistance, it carries a latent sense of the linked fate of earth, land, people and nature beyond borders. So might Jafri here too have been interested in joining conversations that now go beyond the Cold War-era third worldist vision to a fourth-worldist one, meaning one that can take a step beyond the compromised vision of postcolonial Afro-Asian nation-states? One that can think instead in bioregions capable of confronting ecological crises, and in alternative sovereignties capable of facilitating the self-determination and revitalization of indigenous and other marginalized or minoritized communities? One that can address, in addition to the classic modern empires, contemporary settler colonialism as well as the neocolonial legacy of the mid-twentieth century world powers, including that which has since been wrought by the new states formed in the era of “Asia Jaag Utha”?

Finally, to many people in Jafri’s context (and to Afro-Asian revolutionists and international solidarity activists into the 1970s), Maoism meant militancy and revolution as opposed to gradualism and co-optability or adjustment to the capitalist world. Moreover it signified anticolonialism, beyond mere anticapitalism.[28] Stalin’s death and Krushchev’s revelations were several years away. Regardless, it’s impossible now to echo Jafri’s uncritical praise for Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

Of course, these three criticisms are interlinked. It was authoritarian, top-down states that wrought violence upon their own people and lands in the drive toward fast-tracked modernization, industrialization, and homogenization in the name of decolonization. Still, notwithstanding Jafri's deification of certain charismatic dictators, those processes are not what the poem is about. Despite the dogmatic ring of slogans, his political superego cannot contain his irrepressible poetic id. Its energy overspills the institutional structures of his loyalties. Today, we need reimagined political forms, economies, energy regimes, modes of production, affiliations and cultures. In *Asia Jaag Utha,* these possibilities are conceivable as places that might be reached along the roads the poem begins to unfurl—even if we might need to pause at various crossroads and debate with Jafri, or even hold an impromptu people's assembly, seeking new consensus to decide which way to go on. Trying to respond to the poem in its own language helped clarify for me how much (very much!) we can still connect to its expansive liberatory music, plus what points we should critically revise if we're to carry the potentials of the energies it releases into the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Note on translation: in the excerpted sections, the Urdu is transliterated from Ali Sardar Jafri, *Eshiya Jaag Utha* (Delhi: Maktabah-yi Shāhrah, 1952), accessed at https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/asia-jag-utha-ali-sardar-jafri-ebooks. English passages as quoted are from Carlo Coppola, trans., "Asia Has Awakened" as part of the *MULOSIGE Translations* < http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/resources/translations/> project, accessed at http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/asia-has-awakened-ali-sardar-jafri/ < http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/asia-has-awakened-ali-sardar-jafri/> . In addition, I freely paraphrase and synthesize from the original throughout this piece. ↩

2. "This poetry is not poetry / It's the sound of the battle hymn, the thunder of the cloud, the storm's voice, / Hearing it, the mountains come, donning a snow plume on their green forehead, / Weaving the garlands of red flames in their hair of smoke; / The oceans come, sounding the ankle-bells of the surf; / The wind comes, swinging the blue slingshots of its gusts; / Clouds come, riding on lightning. . ."
   "yeh shairi shairi nahin hai / Rajaz ki avaaz badalon ki garaj hai, tufaan ki sada hai ki jinko sunkar / Pahron ate hain, sabz maathon par barf ki kalkhiaan lagaye / dhuen ke baalon men surkh sholon har goondhe / samundar aate hain, jhaag ki jhaanjnen bajaate

/ havae ati hain, apni jhonkon ke neelgon gophanen ghamaate / ghataaen aati hain apne, bjalion par sowar hokar. . .”

3. See Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Paul McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

4. Anil Sehgal, ed., *Ali Sardar Jafri: The Youthful Boatman of Joy* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2001), 32, 64; Shaukat Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, trans. Nasreen Rehman (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2009). See also Mushirul Hasan, *Roads to Freedom: Prisoners in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 105–8; Bruce B. Lawrence. *The Bruce B. Lawrence Reader: Islam beyond Borders*, ed. Ali Altaf Mian (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

5. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) were both institutionally formalized a few years after *Asia Jaag Utha*, in 1955 and 1957 respectively.

6. “Imperialism is in its death throes on Asian soil; / Monarchy’s crown is being kicked by Asia’s feet; / Today Asia celebrates Asia’s freedom / In Asian blood shines the brilliant hue of the Eastern dawn! / Get out of Asia! // Asia’s freedom struggle is the world’s struggle. . .”
“Asia ki;’ / ? khaak par dam torhta hai samraaj / Asia ki thorkaron me hai malukiyet ki taaj / Asia men Asia ka jashn azadi hai aaj / Asia ke khoon men hai subah-e-mashraq ka rachao / Asia se bhaag jao // Asia ki jang-e-azadi hai ek duniya ki jang. . .”

7. By contrast, Jafri’s contemporary N. M. Rashed wrote critically of the USSR as a Russocentric oil merchant behaving like an imperial power in western and central Asia. See Sean Pue’s contrasting analysis of Rashed’s 1957 poem *Iran men Ajnabi* (a stranger in Iran), which points more to alienation than identification between Asian national cultures and histories. Rashed also calls out the “disjuncture between Communist ideology and Soviet practice” (Sean Pue, “Ephemeral Asia: Position without Identity in the Modernist Urdu Poetry of N.M. Rashed,” *Comparative Literature* 64, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 82). Progressive novelist Yashpal had done this too: see Corinne Friend, “Yashpal: Fighter for Freedom, Writer for Justice,” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 13, no. 1/4 (Fall-Winter-Spring-Summer 1977–1978), 65–90; Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires*: *Women, Communism, and Feminism in India* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2018).

8. “The curved eyebrow of beloved China enchants the hearts; / The banner of fiery twilight colour augments the redness of the blood; / Mao’s hand held high points to the road of victory and triumph; / Mao stands atop the Himalayas and calls to Asia: / A storm approaches the world. / A storm approaches the world.”
“Lachakta abru nigaar Cheen ka dilon par jaadu chala raha hai / dahakta rang shafaq ka parcham lahu ki surkhi barha raha hai /{buland jo deka} haath fatih-o-zafar ka rasta

dikhala raha hai / Himalya par khara hai Mao aur Asia ko bula raha hai / jahan men tufaan aa raha hai / jahan men tufaan aa raha hai." ↩️

9. Music from *Pardesi:*

Phir Milenge Jane Wale Yar Dusvidaniya

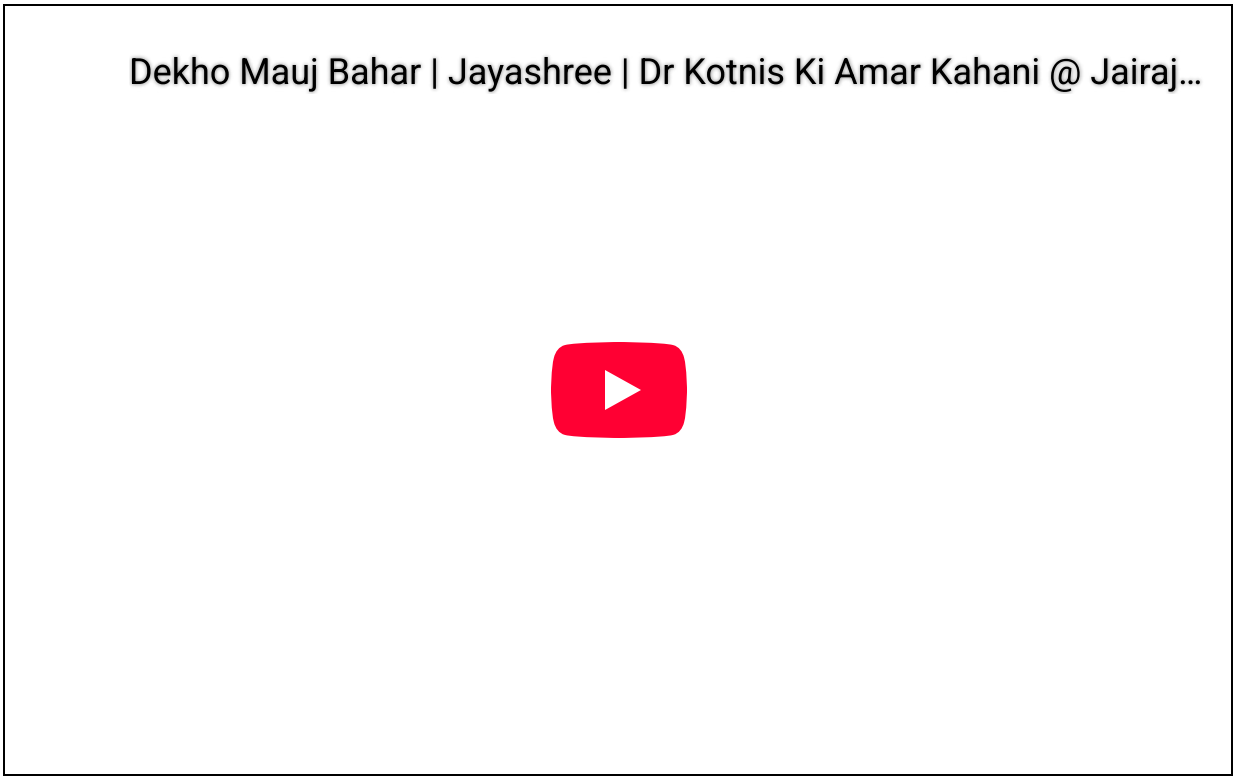
Na Ja Na Ja Balam Naa Dir Deem

Rasiya re man basiya re

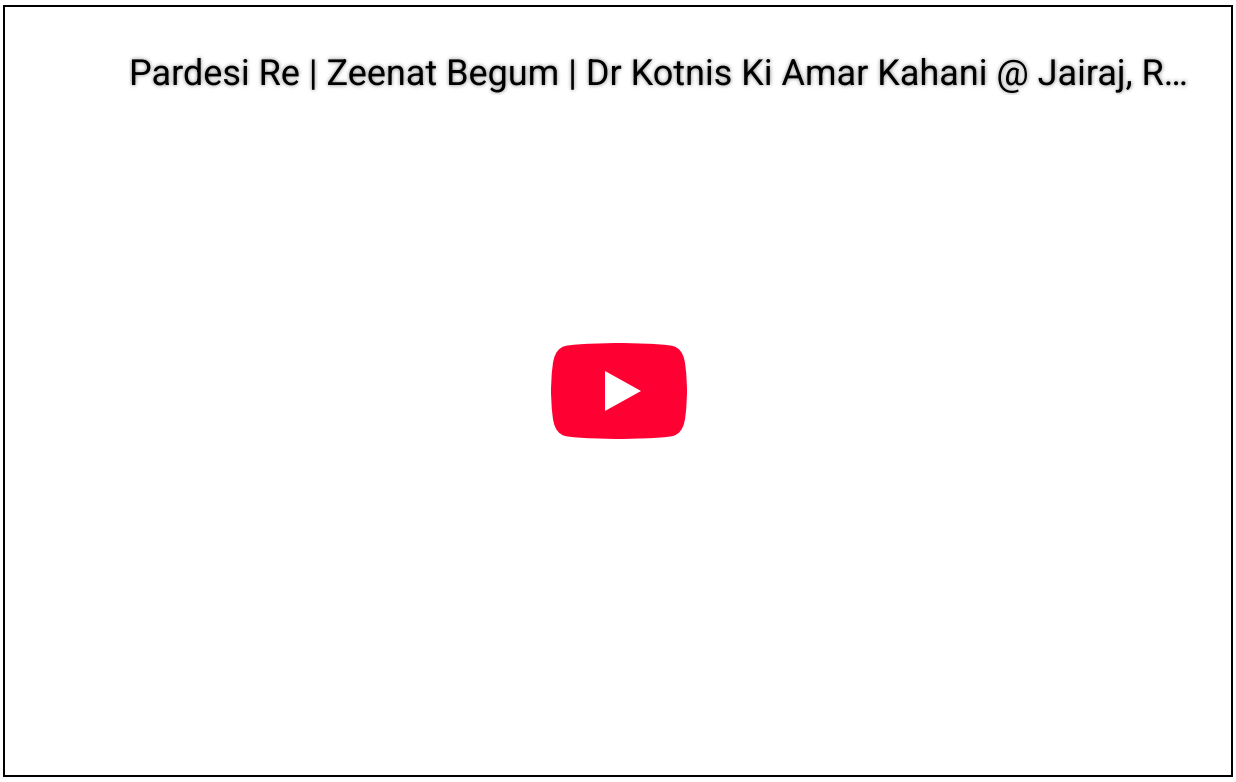
Pardesi was codirected by Abbas and Vasili Pronin, produced jointly by the state-owned Mosfilm studio and Abbas's Naya Sansar, in both Hindustani and Russian versions. ↩️

10. Music from *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani*:

Ghulami Nahin Tu Josh Mein Aa



Dekho Mauj Bahar



Pardesi Re

↩️

11. The WPC was the major vehicle for Soviet-backed internationalism during the early years of the Cold War. Thus for the PWA and CPI it was the major vehicle prior to AAPSO and the AAWA through which they participated in the international solidarity of the global south. See Jeremy Friedman, *The Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Carolien Stolte and Su Lin Lewis, "Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War," *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1–2) (2019): 1–19; US State Department Foreign Affairs Note, "The World Peace Council's Peace Assemblies," May 1983. After 1962, the Indo-Chinese and Indo-Soviet split created a rift in the international and Indian left, with the CPI splitting into pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing (which also mapped onto more establishment and more militant) parties. The slogan now began to appear as "Hindi-Cheeni Bye Bye" (or even later, "Hindi-Cheeni Buy Buy"). Siddharth Bhatia, "From Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai to Bye-Bye, and now Buy-Buy," *Wire,* May 15, 2015, https://thewire.in/culture/bollywood-from-hindi-chini-bhai-bhai-to-bye-bye-and-now-buy-buy < https://thewire.in/culture/bollywood-from-hindi-chini-bhai-bhai-to-bye-bye-and-now-buy-buy> . Nowadays, flare-ups of Indian-Chinese military tension or economic rivalry evince nationalist pride bristling with competitiveness, not cooperativeness. ↩️

12. "China calls out: I am Asia's salvation / Outwardly I am just a country, but in reality, I am a whole universe. / I am the utterance of Mao's lips, which came out of Stalin's heart. / Whose charming tale is becoming ever-lengthy / A storm approaches the world."

"Pukaarkar Cheen kah raha hai ki Asia ki nijaat hun mai

Bazahir ek mulk hun haqqeqat me lekin ek kainaat hun mai

Jo {Stalin} ked il se nikali voh Mao ke lab ki bat hun mai

Voh bat jis ka huseen afsana tavil hota hi ja raha hai.

Jahan men tufaan a raha hai" ↩

13. Some Asian geographies: On the Silk Road as world-organizer, see Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (New York: Vintage, 2017); *The New Silk Roads: The New Asia and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Vintage, 2020). James Scott's Zomia, described in *The Art of Not Being Governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), constructs the Asian inner highlands as a zone perennially exceeding the grasp of state power centers, from Burma to Afghanistan. Gaurav Desai and Isabel Hofmeyr link Afrasia across the web of the Indian Ocean. K.N. Chaudhuri's work on the Indian Ocean world is classic: *Asia Before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Sunil Amrith weaves links through waters including the Bay of Bengal, in *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), and all the Himalayan-originating watersheds in *Unruly Waters* (New York: Basic Books, 2018). Leila Fawaz, C.A. Bayly, Susan Bayly, Sugata Bose, et al. link South Asia and the Middle East across the Persian Gulf, in *Modernity and Culture, from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. Leila Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). ↩

14. "Ploughs now move in the fields of time and history; / Sword blades bear fruit in tree branches; / Drums begin to sound in the wind as soon as one takes a breath; / O mercy! The expanse of the angry, rebellious air! / Get out of Asia!"
"chal rahe hain vaqt aur tarikh ke kheton me hal / phal rahe hain per ki shaakkon men talvaron ke phal / saaans lete hai baj uthte hain havaon men {ruhal} / maala maal bigri hui sarkush fizaaon ka tanao / Asia se bhaag jao." ↩

15. "Earth is immortal, / Wind is immortal, / Water is immortal, / Immortal is the throbbing of peoples' hearts / Which seeks the open spaces of the sky. / People do not die; they go to sleep, hiding their faces in the earth's golden soil, / Laying their head against the golden bosom of their mother, / They see the dreams of spring."
"Zamin amar hai / Hava amar hai / Amar hai pani / Amar awami dilon ki dharkan / Jo asman ki khuli fizaon ko dhoond rahti hai / Awaam murti nahin hai; so jate hai, zamin ki sonahri mitthi me munh chipakar / voh apni maa ki sonahri chhaati se sir lagaakar, bahaar ke khwaab dekhte hai." ↩

16. See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997). ↩

17. "The roads once closed with imperialist stumbling-blocks are now open; / From the lips fly kisses of faith; from the eyes, glances of love; / The arms of Nanking are now the

garland around the neck of beautiful Samarkand; / And Bukhara restlessly embraces Peking."
"Jo band the samraji rodon se khul gaen aa kharsh voh raahen / labon se bu se urhe aaqidet ke, aankh se pyaar ki nigaahen / haseen Samarqand ke gale ka hai har, ab Nankin ki {bahnen} / Bukhara betab hokar Peking ko gale se laga raha hai." ↩

18. Compare Chen Kuan-Hsing's articulation of Inter-Asian cultural studies as a project of "contribut{ing} to the integration of an imagined Asia at the level of knowledge production," and its tasks, with each country and region no longer siloed in its own westward focus,
to build a platform for an 'Inter-Asia' intellectual community by creating links between and across local circles . . . . as part of a larger Asian intellectual movement . . . . Given our recognition that there is no cultural and/or historical unity, but in fact very significant regional and sub-regional difference throughout "Asia," including the effects of globalization on regionalization, there is an urgent demand to move beyond nation-state boundaries to intersect the regional and sub-regional" both within Asian and between Asia and globally.
Chen Kuan-Hsing, ed., *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2007), 1–2. For a critical intervention in the habitual category of Asia as a unified category of study, identity, or political idea, see Gayatri Spivak, *Other Asias* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007). ↩

19. Later, Urdu literary critic Aijaz Ahmad challenged cultural theorist Fredric Jameson's characterization of all Third World literature as nationalist literature, suggesting the alternative of a progressive socialist literature of the global south that was not nationalist but still collective; another way to be not the individualistic stance of the modernists contemporary to the Progressive Writers, or the postmodernists of Jameson's time. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 2008). ↩

20. For Rashed as interpreted by Pue, it is the latter but not the former, to which he contrasts Jafri. Drawing on Spivak, Pue speaks of Asia and Asianness as "a position, not an identity," meaning a definition based in historical and political locatedness, not in any particular inherent content. Pue, "Ephemeral Asia," 82. ↩

21. "Rise, O rise up, Asia's sons; / Descend from the mountain peaks; / Emerge from the depths of the earth; / Leave the wheels of the mills and come upon this road / Where, under the cool shade of a red banner, I am singing; / Let the siren of the mills shriek; / The ships' whistles and engines are sounding— / Let them, for it's the time of insurrection; / Rush from the valleys with storm strength . . . . . / Hear, O hear, my brothers! Yes, you . . ." {How's that for interpellation?}

"Utho, utho, Asia ki beto / pahaar ki chotion se utaro / zamin ki gehraion se nikalo / milon ke pahion ko chorkar is sarak pe ao / jahan me ek surkh rang jhande ke thande saare ga raha hun/milon ke {bhompon} ko {chikhne} do/jahaaz { }ke sitiaan baj rahi hai, bajne bhi do, ki vaqt-e-sarkashi hai / jhapat parho vadion se tufaan ki zor bankar /. . . suno, suno, mere bhai, haan, tum . . ." ↩

22. *Lotus,* a.k.a. *Afro-Asian Writings*, was the journal put out by the AAWA; several PWA members were among its editorial committee. See Hala Halim, "*Lotus*, the Afro-Asian Nexus and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 563–583. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1891570 < https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1891570> ; Duncan Yoon, "'Our Forces Have Redoubled': World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* < https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/cambridge-journal-of-postcolonial-literary-inquiry> 2, no. 2 (September 2015): 233–252, https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2015.11 < https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2015.11> ; Nida Ghouse, *Lotus* Notes, *ARTMargins* 5, no. 3 (2016): 82–91; Ramnath, "Lotus Positions," in *Forms of the Left in Colonial South Asia*, ed. Sanjukta Sunderasan and Lotte Hoek (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). ↩

23. "Somewhere you built victory arches /. . . . / Somewhere you made stone statues. / But these souvenirs of "Culture and Civilisation" are nowhere. / Summon your painters and sculptors; / Tell them to adorn each and every museum with these sorrowful faces / And make immortal your great achievement."
"Kahin pe mehrab fatih baandhi /. . . . / kahin pe patthar ke but banae / magar yeh "tehzib aur tamadun" ki yaadgaaren kahin nahin hain / bulaon apne masvaron aur butgaron ko / kaho ke un dardnaak cheheron ke ek ek museum sajaaden / tumhare kaar-e-azim ko jadu bana den. ↩

24. A fine-grained depiction of any Asian region's particularities, internal contradictions, local power structures and hierarchies this is not. Jafri also does not mention caste, in the Hindu imagery he does deploy. This is consistent with Indian communism's history of recognizing only class, not caste, as a primary structural category. ↩

25. He recalls to us Mount Alamut—mountain fortress of the Crusader-era Assassins, legendary as militarily impregnable while sheltering gorgeous gardens and intellectual life, theology and science, a famed library (and an Ismaili stronghold). He recalls al-Muqanna, a "washerman" or dyer who in the eighth century claimed to be a prophet, fusing Islam and Zoroastrianism, involved in an uprising of Persians against Arabs (Abbasids), as the "Veiled Prophet" attributed with magical powers. In the Western Ghats too (Sahyadri, in Maharashtra, fortified like Alamut), Jafri renders hills as cannons, rocks as fortresses, peasants as a flood. He recalls to us Khushal Khan Khattak "whose every word is a battle song," who advocated Pashto unity and fought the Mughals from Afghanistan; he calls on Afridis, Mahmands, Shinwaris. Time might forget Aurangzeb, he says, but in every century will rise a rebel-poet like that from the Khyber valley, which is blessed to have birthed such a one. ↩

26. Here reprising the same color-words as in the opening: black, brown, white and yellow imperialist invaders; black, yellow, white and brown communist workers. ↩

27. "Separate, nevertheless we are one, the inhabitants of one earth; / We are the settlers of one earth, believers in one humanity; / There is neither a West nor an East. / The earth takes the mirror of the sun and dances; / Life sings the songs of peoples' victory."
"Alag alag, phir bhi ek hain ek ek dharti ke rahnevale / ham dharti ke basnevale ek insaaniyat ke qaail / na koi purab hai aur pashchim / zamin suraj ka aina naachti hai / hayat insaan ke jeet ke geet ga rahi hai" ↩

28. Duncan Yoon writes how in the American context, Afro-Asian solidarity in the 1960s–1970s entailed the Black Panthers calling on Chinese-Americans to be more Maoist, as opposed to aspiring to assimilate to the mainstream. The Chinese-American radical group I Wor Kuen represented the view compatible with the Panthers: they were internationalist, anti-imperialist, militant. Yoon, "Our Forces Have Redoubled." See, again, Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*; also Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Fred Ho and Bill Mullen, eds., *Afro Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). ↩

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